Toccata and Fugue (Adagio)

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Toccata and Fugue (Adagio)

by claritylore

Summary

Seven years on, Will is still haunted by his memories of Hannibal Lecter. When a serial killer nicknamed the Tooth Fairy starts wiping out whole families, he finds himself back in Baltimore and in a race against time to catch him. It just so happens that the only person who can help him is Hannibal.

Notes

WARNING: This story is a reimagining of Red Dragon and therefore contains spoilers for that story. Some bits of dialogue here and there are lifted directly from the books and movie versions.

Chapter 1

Even after so many years, Will couldn't stop the awful feelings of nausea that suffused through him every time his heat cycle began to creep across his skin. It would always begin the same way, with a nightmare of being in a forest at night, fire burning it down and surrounding him, his cries for help unheard as it finally swept over him and turned him to ashes. He would wake up shaking, rigid with fear and more, often than not, dry heaving or flat out vomiting.

No drugs seemed to be able to stop it, regardless of their combination, and the doctors had promised that it was not related to the bout of encephalitis that had almost destroyed him, and his son, seven years previously. Most of them could easily tell that he was going through the typical withdrawal symptoms of a bonded Omega who had been severed from his mate, but not one of them could adequetly explain why the effects were continuing across far more years than was normal, except to blur the edges of the diagnosis into a psychological condition.

Molly was patient with him. She was one of the few who knew the true story of what had happened to him and, as a gentle Beta who had been badly mistreated by several of the Alphas in her life out in Baltimore, she was happy to settle with him out on the island paradise of Sugarloaf Key in Florida. Theirs was a gentle marriage of convenience; something that wouldn't be out of place on postcards and behind the empty picture frames sold in tourist shops. It was slightly dreamy and painted in watercolours, with no great passion or need, but useful to them both as a safe harbour from the past.

While she seemed to grow calm as the ocean as time passed and she felt safe, he still felt like an approaching storm, with no right to live the life of a quiet family man fixing boat motors for a living. Sometimes, when he blinked, he could see the shadows and corpses, the blood and death, that no one else could. His eyes still burned through newspaper stories of brutal murders, bringing the smudged black and white images to life, reconstructing and reliving the events portrayed in type. Will still could not, even now, ever hide from the vivid insights of his mind.

But then there was his son, William Jnr, the bright light of his whole life: an intelligent and quiet boy who looked just like his fathers. The ladies who sold iced-cream and candies on the beach all called him a little heartbreaker. He patently looked nothing like Molly but nobody ever questioned it. No one got close enough.

William had inherited a broad mix of traits from both of his parents, most resembling Will when he smiled or cried and most resembling Hannibal when he concentrated, his empathy balanced, with nothing remotely abnormal surfacing in his behaviour patterns thus far. Will stared at him sometimes, seeing elements of the face that still haunted him, never able to forget Hannibal, even for a day, because of his son.

Nor could he ever forget him when every heat cycle was a crazed nightmare to be endured now, body reacting to the loss of his bonded mate like an addict starving for crack. After

those nine months of pregnancy and freedom from it all, his heats had returned with a disturbing vengeance. The craving never seemed to diminish, no matter how the years stretched on or how far he fled from Baltimore.

As always, at the first hint of flush, he bade farewell to Molly and William and made a trip across the water to Cudjoe. It wasn't ever a very comfortable journey but he never wanted his son to see him during this time. Never. He stayed in his customary hidden away motel, as low key as he felt he deserved, as the terrible ordeal began.

The heat was a fever that arrested his mind like a disease. The first day was always a tangle of traumatic memories, blown into full life by his unduly vivid mental recreations. Will lay on the lumpy bed in the dark, pinned there, a sweaty mess staring into the past.

For some reason, he always remembered the tears shed by Alana Bloom and her unspoken regrets, and looking at her and knowing he could never feel the things he once felt for her again. He had reacted to her Alpha scent with a bristling protectiveness of what he was hiding and all but cut her out of his life. He simply couldn't bear her scenting him and knowing everything. He never really knew if she had figured it out or not.

He recalled those four months of near solitude, where he had permitted no one but Molly, the nurse he had encountered that night in the hospital, to know the truth of his condition. Her agreement to visit him had only started off as precautionary, because she had been far enough removed from it all to be trustworthy, she had a medical background, and she really liked his dogs. He couldn't bear for anyone who had known both him and Hannibal to remain with him long enough to realise that his change in scent wasn't washing off; that it had been a consensual bonding, to the degree that their blood was joined, new life taking root inside him.

Four months of slowly melting into a mess of hallucinations that he couldn't run from still haunted him. Back then he was constantly finding himself out in the fields, far away, with old Winston at his feet, playing guard dog. He was tormented by the sounds of a phantom baby crying weakly in the walls of his house and visions of a toddler crawling about, gorging on offal and blood. It all ended with a seizure and emergency hospitalisation.

And then, the nightmare moment he was told the entire right side of his brain swollen, choked by encephalitis. The overwhelming fear he had felt over losing his baby during treatment had actually taken his breath away, it was so powerful.

That shattering confession he had made to Jack Crawford when he ran out of options had also stayed with him. "I'm bonded to him. It started out... well, as described before but... things got out if hand. I let it all happen." The look in Jack's eyes which would always stay with him.

Then god, that hideous photo, stolen by Freddie Lounds, of Will unconscious in the hospital, body covered in drips, the strong hint of a curve in his belly emphasised by the angle. The one that was plashed across the internet for the gratification of the sick masses. Will had stared at it through scalding hot tears of rage and it would never leave his thoughts. Her awful insinuations had somehow led to a second round of questioning at the FBI, and though he did keep his answers sufficiently straight to remain free, he knew he would always hear

malevolent whispers in the corridors there. Suspicions, like a cloud over what had once been familiar corridors, would never leave him now.

Abigail Hobbs. She was there with him in memory form too. Another tie severed painfully, when she had visited him unexpectedly and given herself away. "They let me see him, as he's still technically my guardian until the legalities are sorted out. I could... take a message? You know, coded. I think he hinted..." He had closed down at that; told her to stop and please, never go to see Hannibal again. It put her in danger and he just couldn't handle it.

Then began the era of endless death threats and letters which could only be described as fan mail asking after Lecter. His address had finally got out somehow online. He and Molly ended up redirecting everything, unopened, to the FBI. There had been mountains of it and he used to dream of being suffocated under it. He was told that there were indications that Lecter himself was instigating at least some of it, passing messages to one or two of his followers through means that were not yet clear, calculating contact with him. Will never did know if that was really true or what was said if so.

The move to Sugarloaf Key had been Molly's doing. It was her inheritance after the death of her Uncle and asking Will to move there with her was essentially her proposal. He was fond enough of her, and desperate enough to escape, to agree.

Will had clung to a dream of a peaceful life, but he knew that he would never really have it. There was a brutal sort of honesty that accompanied his heats now, when he would scream and wail and cry out for Hannibal, acknowledging feelings he never permitted outside of the darkest parts of his subconscious otherwise.

In his mind's eye, he saw Hannibal in his cell in the dark, growling through his ruts, which would probably still be biologically fixed to match Will's cycles even now, experiencing the same pain of separation. And quite often he cursed and shouted at the Hannibal in his mind for doing this to him.

He had no doubt that Hannibal had expected Will to break against the need to be with him in the first year. He could have got a lawyer and fought his way into the Bondmate Programme, giving him access rights to his bonded mate during heat cycles, but that was one story he was not handing to Freddie Lounds on a silver platter. He had stayed strong and moved away to a new life entirely. He'd married a Beta in a roadside chapel and tried to settle.

Most of the time, he could pretend to be content. However, in the darkness of a lonely motel, he could let the pain out at last and be truly honest with himself. Will always shook and cried through the torment of memories flashing through his mind on day one. And as the three days of torture progressed, he often became quite delirious. He could see Hannibal standing in the corner like an apparition. He could taste him in the air. Will reached out for him, begging for him to be real, but he never was.

It was exhausting and unsatisfying. He repeatedly pushed the sexual aid he had to use inside himself and tried desperately to simulate the feeling of a real knot and a strong Alpha body against his back. Will moaned and whined for his mate, wrenching pathetic orgasms out and then sobbing into his pillow in the gloom.

Will barely ate the whole time, punishing himself for his weakness. He should have been able to let Hannibal go, years ago. The man was a murderer, many times over; a cannibal, and a betrayer of every trust ever placed in him.

He missed him. God he really missed him.

It was pouring with rain when Will was finally freed from his seclusion and had to trudge out to make the trip back home. The eyes of the man who stepped through the door of the house were red and ringed with dark shadows, his bones aching and body frail, like the dim shadow of his torment given form.

Will came upon Molly in the kitchen, cooking up a pasta dish. Tired though he was, he noticed the expression of disquiet on her brow.

"What's up?"

She took a long time to answer. "Jack Crawford called," she replied, and didn't meet his eyes.

The bottom of Will's stomach fell out, taking the appetite her cooking had inspired away with it.

"Something about a case. He wanted to talk to you about it. Left his number." Molly looked at him at last, assessing his reaction and questioning what to do next. "He wanted you to call back."

"Ignore him," Will decided. "Just... I can't get into all of that again."

She smiled and nodded. That had, apparently been the right answer according to her wishes.

"He's still rude as an ass."

Will silently slipped away from the table and wandered, wearily, upstairs to get some proper sleep.

He stopped by his son's room, taking a moment to breathe him in and reassure himself that he was alive and safe. Then he headed to his room to collapse in a heap.

That night he dreamed the fire around him transformed into ice and mirrors, while the earth crawled with ants.

Chapter 2

He thought little more about the phone call from Jack Crawford. That is until around three months later, when the man himself showed up at his door, greyed at the temples and not at all dressed for the State he had flown into.

Molly had taken his request to ignore him quite to heart; seven or eights times in fact, according to Crawford.

They were already sitting side by side on a fallen tree log washed up on the shore before Will even really knew what was going on.

William ran down, their dog Lady at his heels, and brought them lemonade with an air of muted excitement. They didn't get many visitors and he had apparently sensed that this man was important somehow. He was curious.

"Hey, did you make this?" Jack asked, with a genuine grin, taking a sip.

"Yep," Willilam replied, happy to show off.

"Thanks pal," his father said. "Hey, would you do me a favour and go help your mother make dinner? We'll be back in the house shortly."

"Sure dad." His son was definitely on his best behaviour. "Come on Lady." He called the dog and the two of them ran back across the beach.

Will saw Jack's expression slowly grow more serious. "He looks..." he started, and caught himself. "I mean..."

"Don't say it," Will warned. Of all people, Jack didn't have the right. "It's been a long time. Why now?" It was funny, but scenting him again after so long was bringing back a lot of strange emotions, the feeling of intimidation he once inspired foremost on top of them. The man smelled of anguish and past tears.

Crawford sighed and pursed his lips. He dropped some photos, face down, on the log between them, keeping his gaze over and towards the ocean. "Two families, dead. The Birmingham one was in the papers over a month ago. The second one in Atlanta was all over TV. I'm guessing you don't watch a lot of TV out here."

Despite the bait laid out between them, Will wasn't about to take it.

"Bitemarks on the bodies are from the same perp. We also have some evidence that possibly links them to the killer of Thomas and Theresa Marlow. Remember them? That was the first case I brought you back in on. The killer tapped their phone to get their security code and then shot them both."

Will's eyes slowly slid closed and memories overwhelmed him. *"I shoot Mr. Marlow twice, severing jugulars and cartoids with near surgical precision... I shoot Mrs. Marlow expertly through the neck... This is my design."* The vestigial connection he had made to that unknown killer had been overshadowed too soon by the eight dead girls created by Garrett Jacob Hobbs, the Minnesota Shrike. He never did get the chance to revisit the case.

"You've already stepped into his mind once. You might know something that could help us already without realising it.." Jack nodded to the photos. "If you can't look anymore, I understand..."

"Don't try to run a game on me, Jack."

"If I really didn't need you to come back, I wouldn't ask. I wouldn't be here. This guy seems to be killing on a mating cycle and the sniffers have pegged him for an Omega."

That startled Will. *'Omega heat scent'*, he thought, and realised that he had picked that up vaguely in the Marlow household, lingering somewhere. Theresa had been an Omega with an Alpha husband, but neither were in heat when they died. He wondered why he hadn't remembered that detail after leaving the crime scene.

"Based on the timeline so far, we don't have a lot of time until his next heat cycle. We have a better chance of getting him fast with you helping."

A trembling hand accepted the two photographs and Will found himself looking at portraits of two beautiful big families of smiling parents and even happier children. He blinked and saw them all dead, murdered brutally. The blood was staining his hands.

His eyes drifted back to the house. He could see Molly and William through the window, together in the kitchen. While he had never connected well to the concept of family, he couldn't help but feel a pang of fear and anger at the thought of something happening to his son, the way something had happened to all of the children now bleeding through the photographs.
"I'll think about it," he said, finally.

Silence descended over them, the ocean a calm fixture in the distance and the breeze soothing. Will wondered if he could actually leave this place and the calm it offered. He had been let into a sanctuary from the world, with its accusations and stories about him, where no one could ever find him and Hannibal would fade into memory. But he still felt out of place and lost there, like a gazelle in a den of lions; still a thunderstorm waiting to happen amidst the calm.

They broke bread at Molly's table like old friends, steering clear of the topics which were actually on their minds, and afterwards Will let William show Jack his trains and the chemistry set he got for his birthday. He wondered if, in another reality or another universe somewhere, he and Hannibal were living happily together, watching Uncle Jack dote on their son. It didn't seem likely.

Crawford fixed Will with a heavy look on his way out. "We only have another few weeks before he gets another family. Go to Atlanta and look. Just look, so I can brief the locals."

Dumbly, Will agreed without even really realising he had.

Molly appeared in the doorway behind him as Crawford's car pulled away. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I don't really have much choice."

"If he was any kind of friend, he would leave you alone."

He forgot, sometimes, that she didn't really know much about his previous work with the BSU. It was a chapter of his life he had closed off completely in an effort to regain his sanity and keep this lie of a peaceful life going. "He's run out of options," he muttered and went back inside.

Will dumped himself on a chair in the living room and stared at the wall, dazed. He was brought back to the present as a surprisingly heavy seven year old boy jumped on him, initiating a play fight that he couldn't bring himself to deny. Really, he found it amazing just how normal William was sometimes, given his parentage.

Giggling and settling crossways over him, legs flung over the arm of the chair, William's smile faded into a concentrated look, his brown eyes sparkling. "That man said he knew my other dad," William said. "I asked him," he added, quickly. "He said he did."

"Yes. They were friends." Will had never hidden the fact that he had two fathers from him. It didn't feel like his secret to keep. He had, of course, omitted a lot of the detail though. "You know, you can always ask me."

"I know," William said with a slight whine that told Will he didn't really think he could.

"What do you want to know?"

William shrugged, maybe sensing that there was a good reason he had such a sketchy account of who his other dad was. Will hadn't even shown him a picture in case, somehow, he matched it up to one online and the floodgates opened. Inevitably, he would have to know more one day, but not until he was old enough to understand.

"Hey, Willy, I've found a Popsicle in the back of the freezer," Molly's voice suddenly chimed in, "I'm guessing you don't want it, so..."

"I do! I want it!" William scrabbled off the chair to go claim the mysteriously located treat.

His absence gave Molly the chance she wanted to perch on the edge of the coffee table in front of Will and take his hands in hers. He still hadn't mastered the art of eye contact, so he stared over her shoulder as she asked him, sincerely, not to go to Atlanta.

All he could say was, "I have to."

Will headed out first thing the next morning.

Chapter 3

"All I'm saying is that was very good work," Jack said and took a big sip of coffee.

Will shrugged off the praise like raindrops on an umbrella. "Good work would be seeing something to catch the guy. I don't have any idea of who he is. He's got no face to me."

"You got us a partial print. You figured out why he's smashing glass and putting it in their eyes."

He had sat in the bedroom of the Leeds family with crime scene photos fanned out around him until, suddenly, it all became clear. There was a photo of a porcelain doll splattered with blood from the daughter's room. The glassy eyes gave it away. "He needs them there as an audience to see, to see him being an Alpha."

It was pretty rare for Omegas to be involved in such violent crimes of a sexual nature. This one was obsessed with the idea of changing, from Omega to Alpha, from powerless to powerful in his eyes. He was assaulting the bodies of these Omega women, in front of the bodies of their husbands and children, as an act of self transformation. He couldn't stand to be what he really was.

As always with the worst of mankind, Will was naturally rooting himself with empathy and thus seeing things from the abhorrent perspective of another. It was doubly disturbing now after over seven years of trying so hard not to.

"I didn't see anything people from your unit couldn't have seen themselves."

"Well, apparently you did, because no one else caught any of that, and believe me, they tried." Jack glanced at him over the rim of his coffee cup. "I seem to recall that's what you said about Garrett Jacob Hobbs before you caught him."

"That was different, I had help," Will said and immediately winced.

The semblance of something calculating appeared in Crawford's eyes. "From Lecter."

"Don't play games with me. If there's something on your mind, come out and say it."

Cards were being laid out on the table, he could tell. "We have less than a fortnight before the next family is butchered and we need to find out who they are before that happens. Would talking to Lecter help?"

"Is that what this has been about?" Will spluttered, his knuckles going white around his cup. "You can scent that my heat is coming and you've been walking me through the rest of this because you think he'll have no choice but respond to me..."

Same old Jack Crawford, throwing him to the wolves for the greater good. The man before him really hadn't changed at all. Every time he gave him an inch and helped him with a case,

he lost his soul a little more.

"I'm just asking if it would help."

"I'm done here." Will grabbed his coat from the back of his chair and headed for the door of the cafe.

"Where are you going?"

"Home. I'm going home."

He rushed across the parking lot to jump into his rental car, but for some reason he couldn't bring himself to drive away. His breath was coming to him in short sharp wheezes, something uncoiling inside at the dangled opportunity to see Hannibal again; an opportunity which largely absolved him of choice, which was the thing he needed to make it a real prospect without having a breakdown first.

All too soon, Crawford was standing by his window, tapping the glass. Will rubbed his eyes before winding it down to hear him out.

"There is something else I should probably tell you. Can I get in?"

Will knew he had let his opportunity to make good on his words and leave get away. Regardless, Jack didn't wait for him to agree. He circled around the car and made himself at home in the passenger seat.

"Do you remember the photo that Freddie Lounds took? You know, the one of you in the hospital with the..."

"Yes." How could he ever forget that humiliation.

"When there were indications that Lecter was trying to use Abigail Hobbs to get a dialogue with you, I took action. I got her visitation rights stopped and then put out an edited version of the report online. Lounds didn't like it but she preferred to have the scoop than for us to give details to rival sources."

A dark, sinking feeling was settling in Will's stomach.

"I spun the story that you miscarried. The photo was used to make it credible. I thought it was the best way to get Lecter out of your life and stop all the speculation. You left Wolf Trap right after anyway." The brief hint of acknowledgement at the levity of what he had said was quickly lost in the grandiose Alpha certainty that he had made the best judgement call for all concerned. "I did it to ensure your safety. Despite what you may think, I never thought you were in with Lecter. He was a manipulative bastard."

Will couldn't speak for what felt like minutes, save to gulp. "Did Hannibal see... did he believe...?"

"I confirmed it to him in person." Jack shrugged. "He may or may not have bought it."

The pain, like fire, in Will's chest stunned him silent. The innate anger he felt towards Hannibal went white hot and then exploded into sheer anguish. He didn't even know what to say, or what to do, or what to think. In his mind's eye he saw Jack Crawford walk the dark corridor of exposed bricks at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, down, down to a cell containing Hannibal. Jack, waiting for the moment Lecter asked after Will to crush him with the news that the one thing he had wanted so much he'd allowed himself to be sent to hell, gone.

The dim thought that perhaps that was why Hannibal had been trying to send messages to him so vehemently, even if it meant going through some pretty twisted people to do so, floated by. The fact that Will never responded, or even visited, never applied for mate rights, might have convinced him. The thought was strangely unbearable.

"I want to talk to him," the words exploded out of him with an unexpected fervour, and he had to quickly add, "about this killer."

Crawford gave him a brisk nod. "Alright. I'll set it up as quickly as possible. How long do you have until you go into heat?"

"Probably a week or so I'd guess. Maybe less."

"I'll call in some favours and try to get it agreed for tomorrow. I'll call you." Jack left his side and slammed the car door harder than he probably meant to.

Will watched him head off to his own vehicle and drive away. He sat in quiet contemplation for the better part of an hour, paralysed with shock at what he'd just been told and ashamed to feel a tingling whirlpool of excitement starting to grow inside his body.

*

"Ah, Will Graham, a pleasure. I don't suppose you've changed your mind about submitting to a few psychometric tests, in the interests of furthering the cause of psychology. I am in the middle of a paper which promises to be quite well received..."

He was less passive now than he had been the last time he encountered Dr Chilton. "No. I don't have a lot of time here."

"I see," Chilton said, primly, still observing him with all the grace and subtlety of a myopic child at a zoo. "Barney, would you be so kind as to show Mr Graham the way?"

An large orderly dressed in white obeyed the order, taking it upon himself to give Will a few tips about keeping to the right as he walked by the cells and not rising to anything said. Then, at last, with a loud clang of bars being shut and locked behind him, he was breathing the same air as Hannibal for the first time in nearly eight years.

He took a deep breath and wondered if it was too late to turn around. At least, his mind was thinking that; his legs were already carrying him forwards.

Five or six cells of frightening looking reprobates, some cooing and gurning at him, calling him out as an Omega, had to be passed to reach the seat placed at the end of the passageway. He did his best not to glance askew at them, whatever filthy things were said.

And then, he was there. Standing in front of Lecter's cell, on the other side of the glass. It felt like being on the other side of the world, despite being so close.
Hannibal was lying on his bed, against the left wall, only the top of head really visible to Will in the dim light within the cell. Will's initial impression that he might be asleep was proven wrong by the slight tilt of his head, as though he was scenting, and a heavy sigh. He didn't move.

"Hannibal?" Will murmured, his voice cracking.

The silence stretched between them like the years they had lost, and which could never be saved now. Will noticed that the hand on the side of Hannibal's bed was gripping steadily tighter onto the metal railing. "They did not tell me it was you who was coming," Hannibal said, at last. "Another of Dr Chilton's games. He does so love his petty tortures."

"I... I have a case."

Hannibal pressed his eyes closed. "Dancing to Jack Crawford's tune again, are we? I had thought you retired."

"I agreed to come in on this." Will perched on the end of the chair that Barney had set there for him. "I have case files for you to look at..."

"I won't help you. Leave."

This wasn't going at all how he imagined. Will dipped his head and then slowly approached the glass, getting closer. With every inch he could smell his mate more, his heart beating faster and faster.

"Stay back," Hannibal growled in a voice which barely sounded like him.

It occurred to him that this had to be exquisite torture for Hannibal and he felt an immediate sense of guilt, bitter on his tongue and hard to swallow.

"Talk to me."

Quick as a flash, Hannibal was on his feet and standing against the glass, palms turning yellow as he pressed them against it. His face looked more sallow, the lines in it creased deeper, his hair longer and less well kept, but he looked essentially the same as Will remembered.

Before he knew what he was doing, the folder of files and photos had fallen unceremoniously to the floor and he was pressing his hands against the glass in return, the feelings of longing overwhelming him. So near, they were so near.

"Will," Hannibal purred and all Will could do was fall into those too familiar eyes.

Abruptly, the prisoner turned heel. He gracefully stepped back into the shadows at the rear of his cell, turned away with his hands clasped behind his back. So much more controlled than Will ever could be, even now.

"That shaving lotion is something a child would select," he said, and waited, daring Will to respond.

"Yes. It is."

Hannibal seemed to exhale a breath he had been holding and gave Will a sharp nod. He turned with his back fully to him now, facing one of his drawings which was pinned up on the jagged grey wall. "Birmingham and Atlanta. You want to know how he's choosing them, don't you?"

The spell was broken and Will picked up the file he'd dropped, feeling quite light-headed. "I thought you'd have ideas."

"Jack Crawford has sent you to me less than a week before your next heat." He turned around at last and looked back at him, eyes sparkling in the light. "What do you suppose we make of that?"

"We're running out of time before the next family turns up butchered." Will opened the files and held up the two family portrait photos.

Hannibal stood there in the gloom, still as a statue, and Will started to feel strangely intimidated. He wondered how all of those years, alone, in this tiny cell might have affected his state of mind. Was he even really the same person anymore, or had the madness that found him in a labour camp in Siberia grown too large for even him to keep down? It wasn't the first time he had been afraid of Hannibal but even back then, when he had been forced to see him as the killer he truly was, he had known on some level that he wouldn't be seriously harmed. Now he wasn't sure what sort of lion was inside the cage before him.

"I can help you. I will indeed do so. But you must do something for me in return."

Will swallowed hard and tilted his head, inviting him to continue. Hannibal first went to the transfer box, inviting him to place the file inside and send it in to his cell, which he duly did.

"Thank you," he said. "There are few things I miss so much as privacy and good company, Will. You will not be surprised to learn that both are sorely lacking in this facility. I will tell you my insights and tease yours out as well, just like old times. But only in *absolute* privacy."

His meaning wasn't entirely clear to Will at first, and when he suddenly realised the intimation behind his words, it landed on him like a tonne of bricks. "No," he gasped. "There's no time." He wasn't about to petition the courts for the right to private access as his bonded mate, though he could see immediately why it had been demanded; it was a constitutionally protected stipulation that heat mating be conducted in absolute solitude, with no Government agencies able to listen in or spy through the keyholes for once. "It isn't possible."

Hannibal sat down on his bed, arms folded, apparently content with his demands. "Do you dream of me much Will?"

He couldn't suppress the shiver that went down his spine at those words. Of course he did. All night and all day, the taste on his tongue was still the taste of Hannibal. It would always be.

Will was running out of there double pace before he knew what he was doing, desperate for some air and some distance. He didn't even stop to speak to Chiltern, just pushed past everybody and ran out into the parking lot. There, he leaned with his arms over some railings, distress painted on his face, wondering what on earth to do.

Chapter 4

"Freddie fucking Lounds!" he growled. "How the hell did she know I was there?"

"Someone in the Bureau must have tipped her off. They also gave her details of the bitemarks on the bodies and the analysis. She's calling him the 'Tooth Fairy'. Seems to be taking off." Crawford said, his voice no less commanding through the tinny tone overlaid by the phone he was speaking through. "I'm sorry."

He stared at the online video of him scurrying in the parking lot, looking rattled, and the huge letters announcing above the video that he and Hannibal were 'lovers reunited'. It was enough to make his stomach churn. "God damn it Jack, this is why I left. All of this bullshit!"

"Calm down. Look, I had a word with the DA, and they're not going to let you onto the Bondmate Programme anyway. They seem to disagree that Lecter's input could help us catch this son of a bitch. The file has been taken off him and visitations stopped." Jack paused. "I need your head back in the game. We have to find this guy without his help."

A headache was creeping around his ears and reaching into the core of his brain. It was too much, too overwhelming. "I... need to think. I'll call you tomorrow."

"Okay."

He hung up and slammed his laptop screen down, unable to look at Lounds' poisonous words any longer. Will lay back on the stale cold bed of his motel room, staring at the ceiling, trying to calm himself. It was raining outside and the repetitive splatter against the windows was something to focus on. Like the pendulum he visualised to calm his mind, it worked on some level to settle him.

Will opened the laptop up again and rewatched the videos taken off of the online social media profiles of the fathers from both the Leeds and Jacobi families. Both were nonsense videos, of a happy middle class family showing off for their friends and for posterity. Both were very focusing; he had to catch the person who had killed these people, their kids, and their dogs. He just had to. Will watched the videos, looking for clues, over and over until he thought his eyes might be bleeding.

Coming up with nothing, he gave Molly a perfunctory call to check that William was okay and then collapsed into Hannibal-shaped dreams he mercifully couldn't quite recall the next day.

*

My dear Dr. Lecter, I wanted to tell
you I'm delighted that you've taken an
interest in me. I know that you alone
can understand what I'm becoming.
I know you alone understand the

reality of the people who die to
help me in these things,
understand that they are only
elements undergoing change to fuel
the radiance of what I am becoming.
Just as the source of light is burning.
I have a complete collection of
your press notices. I think of
them as unfair. As unfair as
mine. The "Tooth Fairy." What
could be more inappropriate.
Investigator Graham interests me.
I have watched him.
I see your attraction.

Will watched with wide eyes as Beverley carefully handled the toilet paper on which the note was written with tweezers, bringing it over the light to make it readable.

He pointedly ignored the sharp look that final sentence earned towards him from Crawford.

"There's a piece missing here," she said, and brought a separate piece into the light.

I hope we can correspond.
After I hear back from you, I
might send you something wet.
Avid Fan.

"There are teethmarks at the bottom," Bev said. "They're a match. The saliva is from a secreter. It's our guy. No question."

"Where was this found exactly?" Will asked.

"They did a shake down to check that Lecter didn't keep anything from the Leeds-Jacobi file," Crawford told him. "This was between the pages of his Bible. In Revelations actually." He chuckled sourly at that part.

Will held his breath. "Did he have this before I visited him?"

"Book rotation reports that he requested this Bible after you visited, so no."

"Why didn't Lecter just destroy all of it?" Beverley wondered out loud.

"Because... he wanted us to know he has this."

"I don't get it."

Will fixed his gaze onto Crawford, needing him to understand. "What do you think the DA would say to a visitation rights request, now?"

Crawford's eyebrows crawled upwards towards his greying hairline. "He always was a clever son of a bitch."

A strange sort of assuredness had overcome Will now he'd seen this note. It was a simple combination really. Lecter had made it known that he had information which would help them catch this killer and the trade off was something very simple; just seven or more of fighting for his sanity and the final piece of his soul. All pretty easy gifts to relinquish in the grand scheme of things.

"Are you actually serious about... *visitation*?" Beverley asked, slurring her words almost sarcastically. "After what he did to you?"

Will shrugged. "He won't talk otherwise. This is what he needs and it's the best chance we have." That the very thought was making his insides hum with anticipation was something he didn't want to confront yet. He again turned to Crawford. "I only have a few days. Can you make this happen?"

Their boss was already halfway out of the room.

"Jack... I need Lounds kept away from this. I don't care how. If she finds out, I'm on the first flight back home. I mean it."

The man paused and acknowledged what he had said before continuing out of the room.

The look that Beverley gave him was unfathomable and it made his collar feel tight. All of the old accusations that were once made in these walls, about his involvement with Hannibal's murderous spree, about his willing participation in their blood bonding, threatened to suffocate him. These people who had once been his team; even if they believed he was innocent, they could never understand.

Jimmy Price intercepted before she had time to ask anything else. "I need to run this under the helium cadmium laser and see what we get," he said, retrieving the toilet paper note for his turn at analysis. "We might be able to get some fragments of the words he inked out on the missing piece."

Will took the opportunity to beat a retreat, but he felt Beverley's eyes burning into his back all the way. He busied himself fetching some coffee, trying not to let the urge to panic and flee rise up too far. This had been a hell of a long day already.

It suddenly stretched into an infinite loop of foreverness when Crawford returned and told him that a deal had been struck and that they needed to go talk things through in the office of a friendly lawyer with access to the right paperwork to push things through quickly.

And even when he had a signed copy of his Bondmate Programme Official Permit, right there in his hand, Will still didn't entirely believe that it was real. It seemed crazy, all of it.

That feeling lasted all through the final few days of waiting, lingering over the phone and wanting to talk to Molly and William, but not daring to in case he let something slip. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he knew he should be paying a lot more mind to the fact

that he was essentially intending to commit a terrible adultery. Even if the vows he and Molly had made were flimsy and they had rarely acted on them, the ring he'd left in his bag since landing in Baltimore should have meant something more than the platitudes he texted to her instead.

He watched those family home videos again and again to take his mind off his own embryonic family, the characters in them taking on an almost mythological state in his imagination as he knew all their lines, their reactions, the sounds they made when they were happy, the whole scenario being painted before him by heart, yet still unrevealing.

His dreams started to catch fire, literally, just as they always did as his heat approached. Will was back in the forest, that place unaccountably frozen in his mind as both sanctuary and resting place, and the fire was creeping nearer. Only now he wasn't alone. He knew, with absolute certainty that his stag was there somewhere, ready to carry him away to safety if he would only acknowledge his need for its rescue. If he would only call to it, it would come.

The confirmation that things were arranged, and Lecter was being temporarily moved to a secure facility equipped for his kind of visitation, came in the nick of time. He was already a sweating mess by the time he had the actual location passed to him.

The onset of his heat made everything remarkably simple. It bestowed a single-minded focus that Will rarely felt in any other aspect of his life.

His thoughts turned to the Tooth Fairy as he took the long road upstate. An Omega, though likely one who was more strong and imposing than most, doing everything possible to appear like a Alpha. A man obsessed with seeing, probably disfigured in some way, or at least dysmorphic, destroying whole families in an effort to bring his false transformation to life. On some level, Will empathised with the concept of a male Omega at war with his unwanted biology and urges, abhorrent and deviant though his solution was. On another, he couldn't understand him at all. He was simply unable to feel anything less than grateful for the extra reproductive ability that had given life to his son.

Though it was possible his changes were affecting his judgement, whatever torments he had experienced in the past, all those terrible empty heat cycles, it all seemed distant and forgotten now. The animal part of his brain was truly taking control over him, with all its need and reckless want.

The facility was a secure and remote unit far out of the way, with minimal security personnel but a lot of doors with big locks. The interiors smelled strange, overused and stale cleaning chemicals marring every surface. It was pretty unappealing but Will was in no position to complain.

He was searched and scanned, and then an orderly took a moment to relieve him of his phone, wallet, keys and shoes. He did manage to covertly retrieve one thing from the back pocket of his wallet, which he wanted Hannibal to see, and slid it into his back pocket. Otherwise he let it all get boxed up. Then there was a pile of legal paperwork which he had to sign to absolve the facility of any liability in the event of injury. His name was reduced to a nervous squiggle on dotted line after dotted line.

The orderly was joined by two security officers for the walk through the sickly off-white corridors to the area they called the 'suites'. They went through several doors in need of unlocking, with a heavy weighted door standing guard as the last one to breach. Will was already able to scent his mate on the other side before it was even opened.

The guards made him wait there as they went inside to remove the prisoner's handcuffs.

Will was instructed in the use of the panic button by the door, but hardly paid any attention. His eyes were stuck on the figure standing by the bricked up window of the surprisingly large room provided, which was essentially a maximum security prison cell dressed up as a hotel room, complete with en-suite bathroom. In return, Hannibal seemed to be looking through, past him, to the outside world or even beyond.

At last, the guards completed their task and left the room, followed closely by the orderly. The silence which followed was broken by the loud click of the lock being turned. Then, they were finally all alone.

Will began to shiver from head to toe. He had no idea why at first. But his heat was gathering pace and he guessed he must be reacting to the pheromones his mate was releasing. Hannibal strode towards him wordlessly, like a sleepy panther, and came to a halt only inches away. He breathed Will in, eyes sliding closed, head dipping towards the crook of his neck. His hands lightly brushed over Will's, thumbs pressing against the pulse of his wrist and then down, fingers sliding between fingers.

Will had expected passion, he had expected desperation and careless abandon, maybe even some anger bursting out between them. He hadn't anticipated this strangely gentle need to confirm his presence. There didn't seem to be any urgency to his movements at all. It was like no time had even passed for him.

"You may think that you were not with me, but you were always with me," Hannibal told him, "up here." He tapped a finger to his temple.

"Yes." Will said.

"Yes?"

"Yes I dream of you," he clarified, responding to Hannibal's final question the last time they met. "All the time. I can't seem to stop." He stared at Hannibal's lips, willing them to touch him, somewhere, anywhere. "Why can't I ever stop?"

Hannibal's fingers slid under his jacket and relieved his shoulders of the burden. "You're part of me. Your scent is still mine. It always will be."

"Why?" He still didn't understand how, after all these years, he was still so strongly connected to this man. Omegas lost their mates all the time, through death and other means, it was a fact of life, and they just had to move on. Their blood bond should have made it harder, but not totally impossible, as it seemed to be. It made no sense.

"We are simply... compatible." Hannibal tugged his head back by his hair, a little rougher than before, but still strangely gentle. It exposed Will's neck to him and he was eager to taste it.

It made Will groan with pleasure from the tips of his toes through to the top of his head. Hannibal nibbled on his jawline obscenely before, at last, plunging into a kiss. The sudden introduction of Alpha saliva into his system caused Will's body to respond, his skin flushing, his insides melting.

"I am not complete without you, Will." Words which made the Omega part of his brain sing with joy. "You are not complete without me. So, tell me how these years have been for you." It felt almost shaming to say it, but Will knew he had nowhere left to hide. There could be no falsehoods here. They were so far past that now. "I wanted you so much... this. Needed this."

Hands which had torn human beings to pieces danced under his shirt and over the bare flesh of Will's ribs, obscene and effortlessly presumptuous. A tongue which knew the taste of human flesh curled around his ear and the teeth of a predator grazed his neck.

"This is so wrong," he couldn't help but gasp.

"Let it all go, Will. All of this worldly guilt which hangs around your neck. Let it fly away." Hannibal kissed him again, using his Alpha hormones to pacify and calm his mate. Will felt his heartbeat slowing and relinquishing its own pace in favour of joining with the calm steady pulse of his Alpha.

A wave of heat washed through him and Will keened in his throat. He fumbled with the buttons of Hannibal's blue jumpsuit, frantically, the desperate need to feel skin on skin gripping his mind. His reasons for being there outside of his own urges were floating high above him, out of reach, easily forgotten in favour of the sensation of the moment. Now Will was a creature of desire, a primal urge to mate made flesh, all want and no thought.

Hannibal was starting to lose his control too, Will could tell. He began to strip Will's clothes away with a new fervour, the scent of his bonded Omega succumbing to heat sweeping over him and compelling him to claim what was his. In generations past, he would have had to fight off rival Alphas also triggered to rut by the scent, and Will imagined that Hannibal would have snapped the neck and eaten the heart of anyone who dared breathe near his mate. Those were simpler times in some ways.

Clothes were lost too quickly to keep track of any of them. All Will knew was that he had to get closer, feel more more more. His fingers raked over the skin of Hannibal's back as bruising kisses ignited stars behind his eyes. The world tilted and it took a moment for him to realise that Hannibal had actually lifted him from his feet, almost effortlessly. The years of incarceration had not diminished the man in any way.

Will was deposited on the provided bed, Hannibal falling down after him. They lay there for a moment, chest to chest, slotted together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, hearts, breaths, everything existing in unison.

Hannibal's hips began to rotate and his hand roamed downwards to pleasure his mate. Will moaned and gasped, dragging him down desperately, devouring his kisses. He discovered that

Hannibal's hair felt like silk as he tangled his fingers in it.

He growled a protest as Hannibal eventually pulled away but quickly accepted the loss with the feel of lips carving a trail down his chest and stomach. Will thought the anticipation it aroused was exquisite; he quickly realised that it was nothing compared to the feel of Hannibal's mouth actually drawing him into its wet heat.

Long fingers teased his body's opening, slick and vibrating with need, just enough to heighten his sensation but not enough to take him beyond the edge. It was maddening and wonderful all at once.

"Please," he whimpered when it became too much, "please..."

Hannibal drew back and rested on his knees, observing Will with odd, misty eyes, a smile playing about his lips. He then flipped Will over and drew him up to rest on his knees.

This was it. Will wanted to cry and laugh all at once. How many times had he tried to sate himself by imagining this, only to feel bitter disappointment at the hollowness that always existed after. Will knew with perfect clarity, when he was filled to bursting, that he couldn't ever know completeness without this. Nothing in the world, and no one else, could ever compare.

"Will," he heard Hannibal gasp against his shoulder blades.

The entire planet reduced down to the size of the room they occupied, folding around them, all thought and sensation focused into the timeless act of mating. The act grew stark and overwhelming quickly, Will feeling his release approaching and pushing back, trying to draw more into him. Desperation took hold until, at last, the knot slid into place and began to expand against the nerve centre of his prostate gland, wrenching an explosion of pleasure from him.

He could almost taste the reawakening of their blood bond, Will's very cells singing at the reintroduction of recognised genetic material. Hannibal bit into his shoulder, the same spot he had all those years ago, instinctively sealing his claim for the world to see as he poured himself out deep inside.

They curled and collapsed in a comfortable joined position, as though they had been practising it for years. Will was breathing heavily, his tanned skin awash with perspiration, every part of him trembling. He fully sank back into the arms that pinned him close, revelling in the sensation of the knot that would bind them together for some time. Will let his eyes slide closed and his fingers thread into Hannibal's.

The old guilt and all the traumas of the past were starting to descend over him again but he held them at bay, determined to enjoy the bliss that only Hannibal could gift to him. After enduring so much misery, he felt he was owed this short time at least.

Chapter 5

Will felt his heart constrict in his chest the moment he finally shared the item he'd surreptitiously taken out of his wallet and pocketed.

It was a half folded photograph of a little boy with fair hair, deep brown eyes and an easy smile, standing on the beach in patterned shorts and a grey t-shirt, beside a sandcastle fortress of his devising, a bright blue ocean stretching out in the distance behind him.

Will had maintained some doubts about sharing it with Hannibal before going in. After all, he'd kept his son far away and, to a certain degree, anonymous for good reason. He had wondered if Hannibal seeing his face would place him in any sort of danger. In the end, Will had decided that he couldn't hide him. It would just be cruel, but he did take care to choose a photo with no decipherable landmarks or points of interest that might give any clues as to the location.

He had never, not even once, seen Hannibal make the expression that came over him on seeing it. It was tender, joyful, overwhelmed too, but also pained. Will wasn't sure if he was glad he'd brought the photograph with him or not.

"I am..." Hannibal paused, scrunching his face up in an unprecedented show of emotion. "It is one thing to imagine, quite another to see. Thank you."

"He has your eyes."

"It was cruel of Jack Crawford to attempt to mislead me," Hannibal said, with a dangerous edge. "I did not truly believe it. Only in my darkest of moments."

"I didn't know you'd been told... that. When Jack said... I had to see you.."

Hannibal ran a finger over the printed image of the child's face. "If you had maintained contact, or answered my correspondence..."

"We needed a fresh start," Will tried not to sound too defensive, and didn't really succeed. "You have no idea how much shit was slung my way. Half the FBI thought I was your accomplice. I couldn't do anything to risk confirming it to them."

Hannibal reluctantly set the photo down on the nightstand. "And now?"

"My visit is fully sanctioned, not that it will stop the gossip." A flash of Freddie Lounds's face passed through his mind and twisted his guts. "You know why I'm here."

A deep sigh confirmed that Hannibal knew all too well. It reverberated through Will, lying as he was with his head on Hannibal's chest, in much the same tangle of limbs chosen for comfort by their sleeping forms.

"Why do you suppose this killer, this 'Tooth Fairy', despises his Omega biology so?" Hannibal prompted.

"Why do *you* think?"

A pause, and then, "Because it engenders a sense of weakness in him. I would surmise that he is physically very strong now but he was crushed down by someone as a child for this imagined failing." Hannibal dared a brush of his fingers across the soft down of Will's belly. "He cannot see the miracle of his status. Only the submission."

"It would have been a relative I think. Probably an older one, with old fashioned prejudices against Omegas. Someone strict... who maybe hurt him. Although the abuse probably started before he hit puberty, he still thinks the way he was taught," Will sighed. "Why did he write to you?"

Again, it took some time for Hannibal to answer. "Many people do. Admirers, schizophrenics, religious obsessives, and sometimes those with similar inclinations to my own. I believe it is my status as an Alpha that attracts him. In acknowledging him, he gains the sense of fellowship he craves."

"Have you? Acknowledged him I mean?"

Hannibal kissed into the dark curls of Will's head. Pointedly, he did not answer. "Why does he shatter mirrors, Will? Why place the fragments in their eyes?"

It irritated Will somewhat that Hannibal was making him tread old ground, knowing he would have considered all of that already. "He needs them to see his transformation, his dominant form, raping and killing like a brute Alpha. It makes them look alive. But he hates mirrors generally because they show him truth. He is also possibly facially disfigured somehow, or at least thinks he is."

"Very good."

"I'm past all this and you know it. Tell me what you know about him. What was in that missing piece of the nnn...?"
Somehow, in a flash, he was cradled across Hannibal's body and being pressed into a kiss. Will didn't consider himself particularly slight in form, and was physically strong himself, so it was quite disturbing that Hannibal could manhandle him with such ease. His question bounced around in his mind like a penny that had been tossed in the air and he was now having trouble catching. The elixir of Hannibal's Alpha saliva was truly diabolical. Everything, heart, head, chest, were transfixed almost instantly.

His mate hummed into his mouth and his tongue swept around Will's, caressing and yet domineering somehow, darting between his sharp teeth. Will couldn't breathe but, honestly, he didn't even want to.

Hannibal grasped his thigh with one hand, the other curled around his back and held him close in a reenactment of Rodin's most famous statue. Will unconsciously hooked his arms around Hannibal and returned the embrace.

The movement of Hannibal's hand onto the rapidly swelling organ between them coincided with his reflex need for air and he fell back, gasping and writhing.

"You are mine, always. Always," Hannibal told him, and caressed him expertly. "Wherever you are, always mine. Tell me... Tell me you know this..."

"I... I am..." Will squeezed his eyes together, dizzy and unable to think. "Oh god..."

Hannibal was swelling too against his flesh and Will gasped out loud again as he was tilted, his leg pulled over the man's lap, seating him on his thighs. Hannibal then went back in for a hard and hot kiss. Will's hands landed on either side of Hannibal's jaw as he raised up onto his knees and leaned forward, forcing Hannibal to look upwards to continue the kiss. In turn, Hannibal's hands grasped onto his buttocks and the sensation caused his hips to weave with need.

Fingers slid into the silky wet heat of his opening and Will could take it no more. "Do it," he whined into Hannibal's mouth.

Hannibal lifted him up and shuffled forward in order to allow Will's legs maximum space. Once assured of his comfort, he gently eased his mate downwards and slid home.

The angle was oddly stretching at first for Will. He had to fold his legs around Hannibal's back and let his weight fall entirely onto the thighs beneath him, pressing him inside more deeply than he was used to at this stage. The knot that would bind them was barely starting to grow and the distant dim thought reached him that this might hurt if it enlarged while they were in this position. Concern momentarily stilled Will, but the fear was quickly forced out with the pleasure of being chest to chest and locked together in this way, his bonded mate heaving and groaning beneath him as they moved in tandem.

What was it Hannibal had called it before, the 'submission' of the Omega status? Well, this didn't feel at all like a submission. Will felt powerful beyond words like this, guiding his strong and deadly dangerous Alpha mate to the very pinnacle of want in a way no other ever could.

Without really meaning to, he thought of the faceless Tooth Fairy; an Omega who had never known this wonder, a face glimpsed only in shattered glass, disfigured by the curves and corners of the shards.

After that first night of bonding so long ago, which was his first true heat and first ever knotting, Will remembered catching sight of himself in the bulbous silver kettle in Hannibal's old kitchen and seeing a whole new person staring back. He recalled the unbidden pride he felt, the realisation that he had been claimed by an Alpha strong enough to tear a man apart had made him feel strong too, no matter how irrational and primal that was. This Tooth Fairy only saw his hated self and was seeking to grow powerful in emulating the basest of Alpha behaviour, rather than embracing the power he truly might have. Will could feel nothing but pity for such a pathetic and unknowing creature.

A pendulum swung in his mind and he discovered the Leeds and Jacobi families were standing on either side of the bed, watching them with eyes made of mirror shards. Will let

the pendulum wipe their wounds away and make them whole again, the happy smiling families who now only existed in their online videos standing there instead. His vivid imagination was catching fire as he sped up, a well of pleasure building between the feel of his hardness being rolled between the slick flesh of their stomachs and the pounding deep within.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs was standing aside in the shadows now too, his gawking dead eyes sending shivers of revolt through Will. His wheezing final breaths, made perpetual in his mind years ago and never leaving, were repeating one word over and over. "See," he said. "See. See. See."

Hannibal's fingers pressed into his sides, hard enough to bruise, and he sunk down one more time before he was stuck. The knot pressed in exactly and pushed him over the edge to a spiralling explosion. Will clung onto Hannibal throughout, his fingers tangling in the sweat-damp hair at the nape of his neck and they trembled together through their passion.

"What can't I see?" Will murmured as he let his head rest on Hannibal's shoulder.

Hannibal tensed through his first release and then pulled Will down with him as he sank back into the pillows. Will let his legs unhook from their crossed position to let Hannibal lie back, and he found that he was able to settle on top of his mate, still intimately joined. The tugging sensation of the angle was very strange and new. Will rested his head on Hannibal's chest and stared aside at the dead kids playing in the shadows.

"The missing piece of the note was a request," Hannibal said. He instinctively tugged on the bed sheets to pull them over their bodies, cocooning Will against him. "A show of good faith, so to speak."

Will squeezed his eyes shut and held his breath. He just knew that this was going to be bad.

"I gave him the address of an old friend."

"Who?"

"Do not be concerned Will. You will not mourn their loss. Few will."

"Who?"

Will was somewhat disturbed to find that Hannibal's heartbeat was quite steady, compared to the hummingbird flutter he felt.

"I have no doubt you will be told shortly. For now, let it not intrude on this. We have so little time." Hannibal's arms tightened around him, telling him in no uncertain terms that he had little choice in the matter.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs was grinning at him now. The sight was truly horrible.

Chapter 6

Will really felt like he was actually an inmate in the prison system when he received the news that Freddie Lounds had been murdered, not by phone or email, but by note; folded under a plate of food pushed through the letterbox of the suite.

It was necessarily brief. All it said was that she has been set on fire by the Tooth Fairy and was dead, with an added line about how audio recordings were made prior to death and sent to the FBI, now being closely analysed for clues. Will assumed the note had been transcribed by a guard from a phone call from Jack Crawford.

"You need have no fear of our time here being reported," Hannibal said, darkly gloating. "No more images captured without permission. No more speculation based on her words. We are free."

Will suppressed his inclination to return a cold glare from his defensive position in a chair on the other side of the room. Instead he folded his arms around himself and longed to be away from there, back on the heat kissed sands of the Key, holding onto his precious son. This was getting too much.

He had little concept of time in the windowless void of Hannibal's world, but he guessed it must be his third day there and his heat was starting to wear off because he was starting to recoil from his own actions. Will felt like he had been in a fog since he'd seen Hannibal again, overwhelmed by the call of his mate's scent. Only now, with the need for him temporarily sated, was the reality of what he'd done reasserting itself.

"Miss Lounds was a parasite. Her death sentence was decided upon the publication of that photograph of you in hospital... for her part in the deception it brought about." Hannibal paused to assess Will's reaction. "And, of course, in creating the tasteless pseudonym which brought her to our friend's attention..."

"Tooth Fairy." Will cringed as he said it. Even he had to concede that it was truly tasteless.

Unconsciously he found himself rubbing his ring finger, now feeling naked without the gold band there. A quick dart of his eyes upwards told him that Hannibal had seen and was choosing not to mention the obvious gesture.

He supposed no questions or explanations were even needed. When he returned home, his change in scent would be very obvious to Molly. Will was quite certain that he was in no danger of pregnancy, given that he was medicated against it, but the stench of his infidelity would still be very apparent, even to a Beta. His body was simply programmed to broadcast his bonding, the ancient act of willingly choosing, to the world to ward off rivals.

Once upon a time, in an apparently less civilised era, it was a highly prized means of protection for an Omega, like being given an invisible shield against the advances of other potential mates, and thus, freedom. It was once liberation. Now, for Will, it was entrapment. Hannibal was clearly confident that any vows he'd made to whoever bore the counterpart ring

had been rendered void now Will was his again. Perhaps he had known right from the start, from the notable absence of a rival scent, that Will still bore his bond and couldn't be fully intimate with anyone else, whatever the faint white line around his ring finger indicated.

The contemplation made Will feel especially nauseous. Even if his relationship with Molly was no great love affair, it was a safe harbour from the nightmare world of Hannibal Lecter and his kind. It was a good thing for him and, more importantly, a good thing for his son. Will knew, he just knew, that things wouldn't ever be the same now. Molly would be repulsed and he wouldn't blame her for it. It was one thing to give in under the duress of being made captive, but quite another to seek this out willingly.

Will's eyes flicked over to the panic button by the door several times and he tried to make himself run and press it. Doing so would end everything and he would never have to see Hannibal again if he so decided.

But he couldn't move. He felt utterly paralysed. His mind reached for rationalisation; he still needed answers about the Tooth Fairy. Something was tickling at the back of his mind, some realisation not yet brought out far enough, and he knew that staying was his best chance to figure it out.

He clung onto that thought like a life raft.

"Will," Hannibal purred as he rolled off the bed and moved towards him, "you know that it had to happen. I would do anything to keep you and my son safe."

"Even from you?" Will challenged.

Hannibal remained silent, his eyes glittering under the harsh overhead lights.

All of a sudden, Will felt horribly dirty. He dodged around Hannibal and ran into the bathroom. There was no door and no lock so there was no privacy, but he stripped off all the same and hopped in, turning the faucet up to the hottest setting.

Under the cascade of heat and steam, he had no time to react to the hands which slid onto his hips and the lips which rested on his shoulder. He also had no way to escape from them.

"Even from me," Hannibal whispered. "I will always honour your wishes."

Will hissed at the betrayal of his body at the sound of his voice so close, the feel of his skin, and the mating slickness came to claim Will again, the blood rushing through him.

"But we are bound, whatever torment your morals conjure," Hannibal continued, voice tight, now pressing fully against Will under the water. "You were calling to me long before I claimed you as mine. Every glance and insight, those long evenings of dancing together inside your mind. You did not fight me. The choice was yours to reject my bond..."

"Stop," Will whimpered, the truth cutting into him like lashes.

"I am your Alpha. Everything I am has joined with you, it has grown inside you. Our connection can never be broken."

Burning hot tears joined the water rolling down Will's cheeks. "I hate you," he sobbed, leaning back into Hannibal's warmth.

"No you don't," came the easy response.

"I hate me."

"Will,' Hannibal purred and carressed his skin through the cascades of hot water, gently holding him through the anguished sobs that couldn't help but escape, and holding him as his muscles began to give way to the heat around them.

"Everything is covered in blood," Will murmured, blinking as he gasped for breath. "I can't see anything else anymore."

"Your imagination is not to be feared. Embrace it." Hannibal kissed his shoulder and the nape of his neck, making him shudder with want. "No more games. You have the answer within your grasp. What is our friend's strongest impulse? Why does he do what he does?"

"I... I don't know."

"Come now, you must look."

"I don't want to." Everything was hot wet red, running everywhere, all over them, splattering and destroying the walls. The reams of steam smelled of copper and fear.

Hannibal growled at his ear and nipped his neck, sending his heart into a freefall spin of palpatations. His grip, which had been gentle, now felt like a chains of iron holding Will tightly. It was a warning to obey.

"He... he needs to be seen. They have to see his power."

"And he needs to see them as well, yes? He must choose them because he has seen them."

"They... weren't random. He... watched them. Yes." Will started to watch the online videos again in his mind, finding them so well preserved there it was frightening. He saw them as beacons of light, family love, and he felt pangs of envy as he couldn't help but compare them to his life of hiding away, of his family that had never been whole. "He was jealous. So... angry and jealous."

The straightjacket of Hannibal's arms squeezed him more, pressing him ahead, into the red fountain... at last into the mind of the madman he had been unconsciously avoiding at all costs, despite his desire to catch him.

"They caught his attention. These families... the way they presented themselves. The way their homes were, um, accessible. Big yards. He brought bolt cutters with him to get through the back entrances."

"Bolt cutters are long and heavy to carry," Hannibal supplied, his voice distant, like the disembodied ghost of a hypnotist's command in the dreamscape of his making.

"He knew he'd need them. Or... thought he would." Will shook his head and frowned. "The door of the Jacobi house had been upgraded and he had to go in through the patio door instead.

There was no door with a padlock anymore, it was heavier. I guess... he scoped it out months in advance."

"Is that the only way he wouldn't know?" A pause and Hannibal leaned in, closer to his ear. "How did you know about the door with a padlock?"

"Well, it's on the... videos." Will felt a chill surge through him and his muscles all came back into use at once, stiffening him all over. "He saw the videos. He... he must have a connection to them online. Maybe something traceable! He's seen those videos! He chose them because of those..."

Hannibal's grip loosened and he slowly turned Will around to kiss him deeply, rewarding him for embracing his insight. "I would say so." He reached behind Will and turned off the faucet.

"How did you know?"

"I receiveed his note the day after your visit and he mentions 'watching you'. You were unlikely to be in Baltimore prior to that, and if he had merely seen a photograph, his description would have been different. The word 'watched' implies more interaction, but I did not believe it could be an encounter in person, as he would not know your location any more than I. From that I surmised that it might be a video of some kind. Something accesible to an *avid viewer*." His voice took on a serpantine metallic lisp with his description.

"Freddie Lounds took a video of me right after I visited you and posted it online. More tasteless headlines."

A private flash of anger came and went in Hannibal's eyes, so quickly it might not have been there at all. "While I could not say if the same method was used to view the Leeds and Jacobi families, I knew you would piece together the information and find the connection, if there. He is a man who must see and then be seen transformed."

Hannibal opened the shower door and grabbed one of the flimsy thin prison towels, gently patting Will down with it. Will was so deep into his thoughts he barely noticed.

"He chose them from the videos. They were posted on Facebook only... friend viewable. I'd guess he would have unfriended them now but there are ways to track that. If we find a mutual former friend... someone with no facial photos, but asinine enough to get them to accept his friends requests. If we then check his friends list... we could find another family, or several others, with videos. We'd know where to look."

"That is all possible."

At some point, Hannibal had dried him, head to toe, and guided him over to the bed. Will set down on the edge of it and looked up at his mate. The intensity of Hannibal's gaze snapped him out of his excitable thoughts and back into the present completely.

"Our time is drawing to a close. Will," Hannibal slid down to his knees and held onto Will's hands, seeming strangely vulnerable. "I want you to return to me. Every heat. Be with me. Make a vow to me, now." He looked down and his voice dropped to a barely audible gasp. "I cannot survive this ordeal if you never return."

Despite his hideous, awful sense of self hatred, and all the blood of Hannibal's victims living on his mate's face like a tattoo, Will wrapped his arms around his shoulders and kissed into his hairline. "I... I will."

The honesty was blinding, like a flash of light catching the side of a steel knife. On one side, the reflection was Will, on the other darker side, it was Hannibal. There was simply no way to deny the truth of it any longer.

Will slowly leaned back onto the soft bed and drew his mate closer, all desperation and need gone, save the need to put denial aside at last. He couldn't live without the beast that had claimed him, the monster that had killed for him over and over, while speaking to him in soft and captivating tones. And so he submitted to be possessed again, embracing it all gladly, making promises he knew he would sometimes regret, but which he would never be able to deny.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had been just like like it was when he'd stared into the pages of ledger in the office of a construction site company and known, just known, that Garrett Jacob Hobbs was the Minnesota Shrike. Francis Dollarhyde, a man hiding behind a profile picture of a monsterous red dragon from the tomes of William Blake, was the Tooth Fairy. Will had simply known it.

His insight had led to several families with online profiles, which fit what they were looking for exactly, and were linked to him somehow, being taken into protective custody while Jack Crawford mobilised the FBI behind an arrest attempt.

Dollarhyde's towering house in the woods was already ablaze when they arrived. Will had caught hold of a hysterical blind woman who was floundering outside. Her name was Reba. She claimed that Dollarhyde had committed suicide. It didn't sit well with anyone there, but when the fire was conquered, a body was recovered which matched her description of the location and method of death - shotgun - exactly.

Will was drained and faint with it all. Hannibal was still on his skin, inside his skin, embeded, never to leave. Jack Crawford, and his former team, all knew. There was no way to deny what he had done, willingly, with a notorious and sadistic serial murderer. Will hardly had the willpower to even try anyway. All he could do was offer reparation in the form of knowledge which would stop the Tooth Fairy and he had done just that. He had saved lives. It had to count for something.

It was a weary and pale shadow that turned around and took the long flight back to Florida with barely a further word as the cinders and ashes were still floating about inside the skelletal remains of the house where Francis Dollarhyde had once, according to the very twisted journal recovered from his safe, been tortured and tormented to madness by his grandmother. The journal was an insight that Will knew he shouldn't have allowed into his mind; his imagination bringing the horror to life more with every page. Will didn't call ahead or give any warning, he just felt too dazed after that.

On the final stretch home, Will padded across the sand and watched Molly from afar, through the window for a while. His skin felt grey and clammy, his cheeks hollow, his eyes lost. Somehow he found the strength to walk forward and go to the house.

The moment he put his key in the lock, he heard a dog barking. The keyhole rattled from the other side and the door was flung open. William flung himself into his father's arms, and Will felt tears prick behind his eyes through the surge of love that overwhelmed him.

"Dad! I've missed you!"

"I've missed you too." He kissed into his son's hair, breathing him in adoringly. "I hope you've been good."

"I'm always good," William confirmed, with a laugh.

"Oh yes. I forgot."

"Silly."

Molly was now standing at the end of the corridor, watching him. Slowly, Will let his son go and walked towards her, watching his wife very carefully. He saw her brow furrow and her eyes gradually get wider the nearer he came, and he felt his bereft ring finger itching. "Molly," he breathed.

She stared at him and he noticed she was starting to move backwards. It was in her eyes. She could smell the scent of another all over him, like the cheap perfume from a whore, but so much worse and overwhelming as it penetrated his very cells. He had the primal scent of a claimed Omega and there was no way to mask it.

"Can we talk?" he asked, though he had no idea what he was going to say.

"You... you haven't called for days," she said, looking away. "You went through a heat."

He paused. "Yes."

Molly nodded. "I think I know where you've been."

"I can explain everything."

For a moment, Will thought she was going to throw something at him, or kick him out, or at least shout at him. In the end, she swallowed it, the way he knew she once had when she had been involved with abusive Alphas who had taken advantage of her gentle nature. Just like he felt he had, not only now but all those years ago when he'd needed a safe haven and rushed her down the aisle to get it.

They spent hours filled with half surpressed tears and questions, discussing things and making confessions. Will was amazed that, in the end, Molly decided to request space only, rather than demand that he leave, despite his guilty confession that he intended to make use of the bondmate rights he now had in place to visit his mate regularly. It was uneasy truce to make but Will supposed that she didn't want things to change. Mercifully, she didn't remind him that she had asked him not to go at all, though that hung in the air between them the whole time.

Despite the truce, he retreated into the solitude of his study to give her some space. It seemed like the least he could do.

It was well into the evening, the light dim and sea outside eerily calm, when his phone rang. Will was halfway through his second scotch on the rocks when it started to buzz in his pocket. He saw the caller ID and considered ignoring it. Something was twitching though, in the back of his mind. He swiped the front and put it to his ear with dread.

"Will," Jack barked. "It wasn't Dollarhyde."

"Um... I'm sorry?"

"The corpse. The dentures matched but they ran a DNA test on the bones and it was conclusive. Not him. DNA matches some guy who went missing from Dollarhyde's workplace."

"So he's still out there?" Will didn't feel particularly alarmed, since it could only be a matter of time before he would be caught, just as Hannibal had been captured as the Chesapeake Ripper once he was identified.

There was a long pause on the other end of the phone. "There's more. We're tracing everything and his credit card was used at BWI Airport. He bought a ticket to Florida. Now, don't overreact. It probably doesn't mean..."

Will dropped the phone.

Investigator Graham interests me.
I have watched him.
I see your attraction.

"William? Molly?" he yelled, desperately. He stumbled through his hallway and reached for the light.

The front door was open. The mirror next to it was smashed.

He ran to it and looked outside. The mangled figure of Lady was left on the porch in a pool of blood, strangled to death.

"Oh no," he gasped and ran back inside the house. Will grabbed a knife from the kitchen in the hall as a makeshift weapon and ran upstairs to the bedrooms, slower than he wanted to but hyper aware of the creaky floorboards and the need to be stealthy.

He hurried to William's bedroom and froze in horror as he flung the door open to find his son held in the grip of a large muscular man with a harelip and fanatical eyes. He was pressing a shard of the glass to William's eye.

"Drop it," Dollarhyde rasped. "Do it now."

Will held out the knife and dropped it to the floor so he would be seen to be cooperating. His old academy training kicked in and he managed to block out the desperation and the fear to consider his options. Dollarhyde was a big man, too big for him to take down without a weapon.

"Daddy," his son cried, wrenching him inside. Will noticed that there was a puddle by his son's feet and smelled urine.

"Your son is about to change. Then your wife will too," the insane man before him told him, calmly. "They will watch as I take you, filthy Omega whore."

Some preservation instinct snapped Will into focus and fragments of the journal he had read through at the scene of the fire flashed before him, gory images and garbled spider writing, ink running through his mind. "Look at you," he growled in a high pitched voice, the feigned voice of an elderly woman, staring at William with fake anger. "You peed your pants? How dare you! You dirty little beast! You want me to cut it off, you little freak?" Direct quotes from the journals. "Do you?"

William's sobs grew even worse and he whined and shook in fear, the glass pressing more and more into his face. Dollarhyde's face was twitching.

"Don't cry at me you filthy little beast! You apologise! Say, 'I'm sorry! I'm sorry I'm a dirty little beast! A freak!' Say it!"

"No... daddy..."

"Say it or I will cut it off! 'I'm a dirty little beast. Freak. Harelip...', " Will let his eyes drift upwards to the transfixed gaze of Dollarhyde, " 'and no one will ever love me'."

The incensed lunge towards him was swift and brutal, the shard of glass suddenly swiping through the air in his direction. Will saw William hit the floor and yelled at him to run. A heavy punch landed on his kidney and nearly paralysed him, and he felt his head yanked back by his hair, the cold touch of the glass slicing across his face, blood bursting into his vision.

Somehow, he managed to drop down and grab the knife. He plunged it into Dollarhyde's thigh and fled to the hallway.

Molly was halfway out of their bedroom, William behind her inside. "What's... oh my god, Will!" she gasped and didn't object as he practically threw her back into the room. He locked the door behind them and ran for the suitcase he had left in the corner of the room. "Will, god your face!" she screamed.

He couldn't stop to think or respond. "Get under the bed!" he yelled over to William. "Now!"

They all jumped as the door cracked, the huge force of muscle being used to beat it down visible in a giant dent. He knew they had only seconds before Dollarhyde would make it inside and there would be no way to stop him.

At last, his gun was revealled at the bottom of the case. He grabbed it and ran to the door, aiming just as the enormous man burst through.

Gunfire erupted from both sides, and Will was dimly aware of slicing agony in his shoulder, and then in his side, but he didn't let it stop him from emptying his clip into the chest of their attacker. In the strange moment of silence that followed the silence of the two guns, he saw Dollarhyde fall backwards and hit the ground in a heavy heap first. Only then did Will lose his balance and follow him, landing on his back on the wooden floor.

His vision was a mess of red, but through it he saw the smiling, darkly beautiful face of Hannibal, telling him that he would live. Will smiled back and believed him, even as the darkness came to claim him.

*

My dear Will,
You must be healed by now, on the outside at least. I hear terrible reports. It is difficult to be apart from you, not knowing the truth. All I can ask is that you do not fear your scars, whatever they are. Our scars have the power to remind us that the past is real. I hold all of the ones given to me, inside and out, very close.
We live in a primitive time, don't we? Neither savage nor wise. Half measures are the curse of it. Any rational society would either kill me or put me to some use. Instead, I remain here, idle and wondering, hurting for you and with you in absentia.
Have you dreamed of me much Will? I think of you both often, on the bright sands, with the ocean behind you.
I hope, now that you are well, to be reunited with you soon.
Yours eternally,
Hannibal Lecter

Chapter End Notes

Next part now up: Toccata and Fugue (Al Fine)

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